

Although I moved fifty years ago, this summer I will return to the city of my birth...where I will stay for three weeks. I've come back many times, but this will be the longest visit I've ever made. No doubt the contrast of how I began my life and how I live it now will be prominent in my thoughts. True, I think about this every time I return to Salt Lake City. However this summer, when the Episcopal Church holds its triennial General Convention in Salt Lake City, the past and the present will merge in new ways. More specifically, on Sunday, June 28, when the Episcopal Women's Caucus hosts its ever popular General Convention breakfast, I will celebrate my fifteenth anniversary of ordination to the priesthood in the Episcopal Church. I've come a long way from the little Mormon girl I was when my family moved away in 1966.

My mother loved to tell the story of my birth. On February 14, 1957, she walked outside on a snowy night, hoping to induce labor, yearning for her baby, me, to be born on Valentine's Day. I, however, in a rare act of self-definition, at least in terms of my early relationship with my mother, chose to wait until 6pm on February 15th to be born. Both of my parents come from a long line of bedrock Mormons, pioneers who travelled to Salt Lake City by wagon train in 1848 to form the community that became Salt Lake City. Then family members who had converted to the Mormon faith left homes in Missouri, Alabama, Massachusetts, and Manchester, England, to travel to Salt Lake City and join the new Latter Day Saints in their promised land. One great grandmother, Johanna, left her husband in England, travelled while pregnant, toting along two other children. One child died on the ship crossing the Atlantic. Johanna and her son walked from Missouri to Utah in her last trimester of pregnancy. A baby boy, my great grandfather, was born shortly after her arrival in Utah. A year later her husband joined her. A few years after that he took a second wife, and refusing to live in a pluralistic marriage, Johanna divorced her husband. She spent the rest of her life in poverty, marginalized from the Mormon community.

I come from a family of people who cut themselves off from their families of origin, moved west and formed new families with spouses and children and neighbors. It wasn't the utopia they thought it would be. The brokenness in my family is generations old, manifesting in divorces and alcoholism and depression. I have spent my life trying to be healthy and to change the family pattern of disconnect and alcoholic dis-ease.

All that is how I see my life, now, looking back. As a child however I loved my church and I loved Salt Lake City. I still love Salt Lake City. Being in Salt Lake City is for me a spiritual experience, my soul resonates with a certain kind of peace, it is "home." Now I have a new church to love, one that has strong roots in Utah. As a child, however, I only knew the Mormon Church. My grandfather was a high priest in the church. My uncle baptized me in the famous immersion pool in the tabernacle at Temple Square. I was nine when he submerged me three times, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. I have fond memories of going to hear the Mormon Tabernacle Choir on Easter morning, wearing my finest frilly dress and gloves.

The Mormon Church formed my faith, providing a foundation even as I grew up and moved away from that church. True, I had many questions, even as a child, about the teachings of the church. I could not wrap my head around a God who would send little babies to hell for all eternity simply because they

were not baptized in the Mormon Church. I know now that one is not baptized into a denomination, rather one is baptized a Christian. Even as a child I could not imagine a God, who created this diverse and beautiful world and the people in it, requiring God's people to practice a specific faith in order to be welcomed back into God's loving arms. That's one reason I love the Episcopal Church, its spirit of openness and its refusal to require members to adhere to narrow teachings of God and faith, but rather through the baptismal covenant offers us clear teachings on what it means to live a Christian life founded on justice for all.

Salt Lake City is beautiful. Nestled in a valley and surrounded by the Rocky Mountains, it holds breathtaking views within the city limits. The center of town heralds Temple Square, a gorgeous piece of property with the Mormon Temple and other buildings that are no longer used as they were when I was a child, but remain as museum pieces with daily tours offered.

Walking the blocks that surround Temple Square one encounters a variety of people from all over the world. Some are more orthodox Mormons, women wearing long dresses and families with lots of children. Others are modern Mormons, indistinguishable in appearance from anyone else. Mormons are usually well educated, polite, and considerate people. They believe in clean living, that our bodies are temples for our souls, a gift from God which should be tended to with respect. As a result Mormons don't consume caffeine or alcohol. There is no prohibition against consuming them as if doing so were a mortal sin. They just don't because they are bad for our bodies. In contrast to this attitude, sugar is a beloved substance. Mormons love their sweets, especially jello, ice cream, cookies, and cake.

When one is in Salt Lake City one will note that there are no bars. Nor can one purchase alcohol in a grocery store, although point beer (3.2 % by weight or 4% by volume) is available for purchase. At a restaurant one needs to order a meal if one intends to consume alcohol. To purchase a quality bottle of wine one needs to drive to a state owned liquor store, which looks something like a small prison. The appearance alone is enough to induce guilty feelings before one has even entered the doors. A google search will lead one to more in-depth information on Utah's weird alcohol laws, if one is interested in knowing more.

Not far from Salt Lake City one will find prime birdwatching sites along the Great Salt Lake. In the winter one can find nearby premiere ski resorts, which in the summer offer beautiful vistas of wildflowers and scenic views. If one is so inclined one can make the drive to southern Utah, a desert land of bluffs and cliffs, home to the Escalante Grand Staircase and Bryce Canyon, Moab, and other areas of rare beauty that rival the Grand Canyon.

The first time I attended the General Convention of the Episcopal Church, I felt like a total church geek. I loved the huge sign hanging over the convention center boldly stating that "The Episcopal Church Welcomes You!" I was impressed by the crowds, by being in the presence of thousands of Episcopalians from all over the world, who had come to do the work of the church, or, just to visit and feel the potency of such a gathering. This summer my life, past and present, will converge into one. The city of my birth, all my family members still living there, and my life now as an Episcopal priest working for justice promoting the dignity of every human being. My Mormon roots taught me to have faith in God,

to believe that God loves me, and that God is very present in my life. God is present in all of life. Understanding that has always held me in good stead. It is perhaps the primary reason I became an Episcopalian in the first place. As an adult my response to my childhood faith was to find a church that would encourage me to know God more deeply, not by living with certitude and conforming to church teachings that portray a narrow God, but by finding one that would embrace my questions and help me weave together a new cloth from the many threads of faith that life had offered me.